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(p. 2, 3)

PAGE 01 BUENOS 03394 01 OF 02 032155Z
ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 HA-02 NSC-05 L-01 INR-05
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[REDACTED] SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 3394

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
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SUBJECT: REPORTS OF TORTURE IN ARGENTINA

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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

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1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.
IN ORDER TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS POSED IN THE
DEPARTMENT'S INQUIRY (SEE REFTEL, WE HAVE
DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN TORTURE AND SUCH OTHER
MANIFESTATIONS OF BRUTALITY AS HOSTILE
INTERROGATION (WHICH IS PRIMARILY PSYCHOLOGICAL),
AND POLICE AND PRISON GUARD BRUTALITY.
HOSTILE INTERROGATION IS PRACTICED IN ALMOST
ALL ABDUCTIONS BY THE SECURITY FORCES. PHYSICAL
TORTURE IS USED REGULARLY DURING THE INTERROGATION
OF SUSPECTED TERRORISTS AND SO-CALLED "CRIMINAL
SUBVERSIVES" WHO DO NOT FULLY COOPERATE.
BRUTALITY AT THE HANDS OF POLICE OR PRISON GUARDS
OCCURS INFREQUENTLY AND IS COUNTER TO ESTABLISHED POLICY.

2. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO MEASURE HOW WIDELY TORTURE IS
USED IN PRACTICE. WE HAVE HEARD OF ONLY ONE CREDIBLE CASE

PAGE 02 BUENOS 03394 01 OF 02 032155Z

OF TORTURE DURING AN INTERROGATION WHICH TOOK PLACE
DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS. WE HAVE RELIABLE INFORMATION

Current Class: [REDACTED]

Page: 1

UNCLASSIFIED

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ABOUT TWO CASES DURING SEPTEMBER AND DECEMBER 1977.
(THE MANY OTHER INCIDENTS REPORTED TO US TOOK PLACE,
FOR THE MOST PART, BACK DURING 1976 AND EARLIER IN 1977.)
THESE ARE SUFFICIENT TO DEMONSTRATE TO US THAT
TORTURE HAS NOT BEEN FORESWORN. WE ARE REASONABLY
CERTAIN, RATHER, THAT RECENTLY THERE WAS AFFIRMATION
OF THE NEED TO CONTINUE THE WAR AGAINST TERRORISM-
SUBVERSION AS IT WAS BEING FOUGHT. IF THERE HAS BEEN
A NET REDUCTION IN TORTURE (BY WHATEVER UNITS ONE MAY
MEASURE IT) THIS PROBABLY DERIVES FROM FEWER OPERATIONS
AS THE NUMBER OF TERRORIST AND SUBVERSIVE TARGETS
DIMINISH.

3. [REDACTED] HAS FOUND THAT
TORTURE OF POLITICAL DETAINEES IN THE PRISONS [REDACTED]
IS EXTREMELY RARE, ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW INSTANCES
OF GUARD BRUTALITY. IN THIS CATEGORY OF DETAINEES
ARE THE APPROXIMATELY THREE THOUSAND THREE HUNDRED
"PODER EJECUTIVO NACIONAL" (PEN) PRISONERS. BEATINGS
AND ASSAULTS DO TAKE PLACE DURING TRANSFERS FROM JAIL
TO JAIL, AND [REDACTED] REGARDS TRANSFER AS THE
GREATEST THREAT TO PEN DETAINEES.

B1

4. PENALTIES EXIST FOR THE MALTREATMENT OF COMMON
CRIMINALS AND PRISONERS--AS OPPOSED TO POLITICAL
DETAINEES--AND INSTANCES ARE, WE BELIEVE, CORRESPONDINGLY
FEWER. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE REPORTS OF POLICE BRUTALITY
IN ORDINARY CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS WE BELIEVE THIS IS
COUNTER TO POLICY, AND CAN LEAD TO PROSECUTION OF THE
RESPONSIBLE POLICE OFFICERS.

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 03394 01 OF 02 032155Z

5. THE REMAINDER OF THIS REPORT DEALS WITH THE AREA
OF TORTURE AND MISTREATMENT WE THINK IS SIGNIFICANT:
HOSTILE INTERROGATION AND TORTURE OF PERSONS SUSPECTED OF
TERRORISM OR SUBVERSION, AND OF PERSONS--INCLUDING
FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS--WHO MIGHT HAVE SOME KNOWLEDGE
OF THESE ACTIVITIES. OUR DATA BASE FOR THE FOLLOWING
OBSERVATIONS IS SMALL, BUT THE CONCLUSIONS REPRESENT
THE BEST INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO SEVERAL SECTIONS OF
THE EMBASSY. END OF INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

6 CLANDESTINE SEIZURE, HOSTILE INTERROGATION, AND
SUMMARY ADJUDICATION REMAIN BASIC OPERATING PROCEDURES

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Current Class: [REDACTED]
Current Handling: LIMDIS
Document Number: 1978BUENOS03394

Page: 3

Channel: n/a

FOR ARGENTINA SECURITY FORCES. SENIOR OFFICIALS OF THE ARGENTINE ARMY WERE REPORTED TO HAVE DECIDED IN LATE MARCH TO CONTINUE CURRENT OPERATING SECURITY PROCEDURES AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THE WORLD CUP SOCCER MATCHES. [REDACTED] [REDACTED]

B1

7. HOSTILE INTERROGATION BEGINS WITH THE SEIZURE OF THE TARGETED PERSON. OPERATIONS ARE USUALLY CONDUCTED AT NIGHT. THE PRISONERS ARE NORMALLY HOODED OR BLINDFOLDED, VERBAL THREATS AND OFTEN PHYSICAL FORCE ARE USED DURING THE EARLIEST MOMENTS OF THE SEIZURE. THE INTENDED EFFECT IS TO FRIGHTEN AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY DISORIENT THE PRISONER. IN A NUMBER OF CASES, ESPECIALLY AGAINST SOFTER IDEOLOGICAL SUBVERSIVES (WHO GENERALLY ARE CONVINCED THAT THEY HAVE COMMITTED NO CRIMES), THIS PSYCHOLOGICAL INTIMIDATION IS PROBABLY ENOUGH TO PRODUCE A FREE FLOW OF INFORMATION.

8. THE EMBASSY HAS THE IMPRESSION THAT MANY OF THE PERSONS SEIZED ARE NOT SUBJECTED TO ADDITIONAL PHYSICAL ABUSE, IF THEY COOPERATE WILLINGLY. THE PURPOSE OF INTERROGATIONS IS OFTEN NOT TO PRODUCE INFORMATION REGARDING THE CULPABILITY OF THE DETAINED PERSON,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

PAGE 04 BUENOS 03394 01 OF 02 032155Z

BUT RATHER TO OBTAIN INFORMATION ABOUT OTHERS.

9. DURING THE LAST SEVERAL MONTHS THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED FIRST HAND REPORTS OF PHYSICAL TORTURE CONDUCTED AT THE LA PERLA INTERROGATION CENTER, LOCATED JUST OUTSIDE CORDOBA, BUT THE TIME FRAME OF THESE EVENTS WAS SEPTEMBER 1977. PERSONS THERE WERE REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO ELECTRIC SHOCK, THE SUBMARINE (PROLONGED SUBMERSION UNDER WATER), SODIUM PENTOTHAL, SEVERE BEATINGS, INCLUDING "EL TELEFONO", IN WHICH A SIMULTANEOUS BLOW IS
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PAGE 01 BUENOS 03394 02 OF 02 032202Z

Current Class: [REDACTED]

Page: 3

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

Current Class: [REDACTED]
Current Handling: LIMDIS
Document Number: 1978BUENOS03394

Page: 4

Channel: n/a

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 HA-02 NSC-05 L-01 INR-05
CIAE-00 NSAE-00 MCT-01 TRSY-01 SP-02 PA-01 IO-06
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R 032111Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5581

[REDACTED] SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 3394

LIMDIS

DELIVERED TO BOTH EARS WITH CUPPED HANDS.. ANOTHER
FIRST HAND ACCOUNT REPORTS ELECTRIC SHOCK, BEATINGS
AND MOCK EXECUTIONS BEING USED AT "LA FAMILIA"
INTERROGATION CENTER, LOCATED IN TUCUMAN PROVINCE
NEAR THE MAJOR PROVINCIAL ARMY CAMP. WE HAVE ONE
CREDIBLE REPORT OF TORTURE IN THE PAST FEW WEEKS,
BUT FEW DETAILS; WE HAVE ONE RELIABLE SECOND HAND
REPORT OF TORTURE DURING LATE DECEMBER.

10. ARGENTINE AUTHORITIES CONTINUE TO STATE PUBLICLY
THAT TORTURE DOES NOT TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE COUNTRY,
EXCEPT IN A FEW ISOLATED AND UNAUTHORIZED CASES. WIDE
PRESS PUBLICITY IS OCCASIONALLY GIVEN TO THE PUNISHMENT
OF POLICE OFFICERS FOR THEIR COMPLICITY IN THE TORTURE
OF PERSONS IN THEIR CUSTODY, BUT THESE ALMOST INVARIABLY
REFER TO ORDINARY CRIMINAL SUSPECTS. NO SUCH CHARGES
HAVE BEEN PUBLICLY MADE AGAINST MEMBERS OF THE ARMED
FORCES, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE BEEN TOLD INFORMALLY THAT
INTERNAL DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS HAVE IN FACT TAKEN
PLACE FOR UNAUTHORIZED EXCESSES.

11. IN SHORT, HOSTILE INTERROGATION AND TORTURE OF CERTAIN
CLASSES OF SUSPECTS-ARE

PAGE 02 BUENOS 03394 02 OF 02 032202Z

STILL STANDARD PROCEDURES IN ARGENTINA. THEY
CONTINUE TO BE JUSTIFIED RHETORICALLY AS A NECESSARY
PART OF FIGHTING A "DIRTY WAR" AND OPERATIONALLY ON
THE BASIS THAT THESE PROCEDURES HAVE PROVEN TO BE
MOST EFFECTIVE TOOLS IN ROOTING OUT TERRORISTS AND
SUBVERSIVES. ALTHOUGH THE GOA'S VICTORY IN THE WAR

Current Class: [REDACTED]

Page: 4

UNCLASSIFIED

Current Class: [REDACTED]
Current Handling: LIMDIS
Document Number: 1978BUENOS03394

UNCLASSIFIED

Page: 5

Channel: n/a

AGAINST TERRORISM LOOKS ASSURED, THE DEMONSTRATED EFFICIENCY OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM APPEARS TO MILITATE AGAINST ABANDONING THIS SYSTEM AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ANTI-SUBVERSIVE SYSTEM. ALTHOUGH CLANDESTINE SEIZURE AND SUMMARY JUDGMENT CAN BE REPLACED WITH NORMAL POLICE ARRESTS AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES, HOSTILE INTERROGATION AND TORTURE CANNOT. ANY SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARD INCREASED DUE PROCESS MUST COME FROM A DECISION OF THE GOA TO FORGO THE SPEED, EFFICIENCY, AND EASE OF THESE PROCEDURES WHICH ARE IN A SENSE THE KEYSTONE OF THE PRESENT DAY ARGENTINE COUNTER SUBVERSIVE SYSTEM. ABANDONING THESE WOULD SERIOUSLY LIMIT THE INFORMATION WHICH THE SECURITY FORCES PRESENTLY HAVE AVAILABLE. THIS WOULD MEAN TO SECURITY OFFICIALS--AND GOVERNMENT LEADERS AS WELL-- THAT HARDENED TERRORISTS AND SUBVERSIVES COULD REMAIN SILENT, LEADS WOULD BE MUCH HARDER TO DEVELOP, AND EVENTUAL JUSTICE MUCH LESS CERTAIN FOR THOSE THOUGHT GUILTY.

12. ABANDONING HOSTILE INTERROGATION AND TORTURE ENTIRELY APPEARS REMOTE IN THE NEAR FUTURE AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THE WORLD CUP SOCCER MATCHES IN JUNE. THE DISCUSSION OF NORMALIZATION EFFORT WITHIN THE GOA APPEARS AIMED AT LIMITING PHYSICAL TORTURE TO ONLY THE MORE SERIOUS AND IMPORTANT CASES; NOT TO ABANDONING IT.

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 03394 02 OF 02 032202Z

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Current Class: [REDACTED]

Page: 5

UNCLASSIFIED